

Yahweh, Jehovah or Allah – Which is God's real name?

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The One God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims

Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe that there is only one God.

In the Jewish scriptures, God is called by many names in the Hebrew language, since those are Hebrew texts. The most famous of these names is the name Yahweh. The basic creed of the Jews is found in the Bible in the Book of Deuteronomy 6:4 as follows:

“Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh. (The New Jerusalem Bible, Deut. 6:4)

Notice in the above verse that God's name is Yahweh. That name eventually fell into disuse. The same verse above is quoted in the Christian New Testament, but without the name, as follows:

“Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord”(Mark 12:29)

Notice that this verse from Mark's gospel is identical to the verse from Deuteronomy, except for one obvious difference. The name Yahweh occurred twice in the Deuteronomy verse, but never in Mark's quotation. Mark, being a Greek writer, replaced the Hebrew word Yahweh with the Greek words ho kyrios meaning 'the Lord,' and kyrios meaning 'Lord.'

One translation of the Bible renders the above verse from Mark as follows: *“Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah” (Mark 12:29 New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1961, revised 1984).*

Notice here that now, instead of Yahweh, the name Jehovah is substituted.

The Qur'an also insists there no god but One God. In the Qur'an, however, we notice two significant differences from the previous scriptures. The first difference is that the book addresses not just the

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Israelites, but all mankind. In the Qur'an it is no longer "Hear O Israel" alone, but rather "O Mankind." The Qur'an says for example: "O Mankind! Worship your Lord, who has created you and those before you" (Qur'an 2:21)

The second difference from the previous scriptures is that the Qur'an, having been revealed in the Arabic language, uses the Arabic name for the one true God – Allah. The Qur'an says for example: "Allah! There is no god except Him, the Alive, the Eternal" (Qur'an 2:255).

This name of God is used by Arabic speaking Christians and Jews and by Muslims of every language. The New Encyclopedia Britannica says: "Allah is the standard Arabic word for "God" and is used by Arab Christians as well as Muslims" (Britannica, 1990 edition, vol. 1, p.276).

So here we have in various languages three names for the same God – the one true God who was worshipped by Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them). Now, which is the name that God said we should use in addressing Him? Is it Yahweh, Jehovah, or Allah – or does it matter? For an answer, we will have to examine the scriptures in some depth. Let us proceed.

Is God's name Jehovah?

The name Jehovah occurs a few times in the King James Bible. This name, however, arose by mistake. Harper's Bible Dictionary says that it was "the result of the translators' ignorance of the Hebrew language and customs" (1985 edition, p. 1036). The book World Religions From Ancient History to the Present says: "The name Jehovah is a medieval misreading and does not occur in the Hebrew Bible (edited by Geoffrey Parrinder, p. 386).

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible says that the name Jehovah is "an artificial name" (vol. 2, p. 817).

Asimov's Guide to the Bible says that the name Jehovah "arose by mistake" (vol. 1, p. 135). The author further says: "This mistake has persisted and will probably continue to persist" (p. 135).

Is the author right about the last comment? Does the mistake need to persist? Certainly not. Good men and women everywhere who concern themselves with doing the right thing will correct their mistake when they understand it to be a mistake. Let us try to understand here how this mistake arose, and how we may correct it.

The most famous name for God in the Old Testament is called the Sacred Tetragrammaton, which means a word consisting of four letters. No one today knows how to pronounce the tetragrammaton, because all four letters, YHWH, are all consonants. How can you pronounce a

word without vowels?

The word Jehovah is a mistaken pronunciation of this word. The mistake arose when a Christian scholar Petrus Galantinus (around A.D. 1520) combined the consonants YHWH with vowels belonging to a different word Adonai. The vowels a, o, and a of Adonai, were dovetailed into the four letters to form YaHoWaH. This was written out Jahowah because in Latin the initial J is pronounced like initial Y in English (see Asimov's Guide to the Bible, vol. 1, p. 135). Jahowah was further anglicized Jehovah (see also The Oxford English Dictionary, 1933 edition, reprinted 1961, p. 564).

Even those who continue in this mistake today admit that the name Jehovah arose in this fashion. For example the book The Divine Name that will Endure Forever, says on page 8:

"When it came to God's name, instead of putting the proper vowel signs around it, in most cases they put other vowel signs to remind the reader that he should say 'Adho'nai. From this came the spelling Iehoauah, and eventually, Jehovah . . ." (published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1984).

The same book says on page 7: "The truth is, nobody knows for sure how the name of God was originally pronounced."

Well, does that mean we should give up all hope of ever knowing God's name? No. In the Bible, God promised to raise up a prophet who will speak the words of God in God's name (see Deuteronomy 18:19). That prophet has come. He recited the words of God beginning the name of God. The scripture he received from God beginning the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Praising the worlds . . ." (Qur'an surah 1.)

Let's Chat About Islam!

Is it right to use and proliferate the name Jehovah?

We have already looked at several citations from biblical commentaries and other textbooks showing that the name Jehovah arose by mistake. We shall now explore more fully the question of whether this mistaken name should be used and proliferated by those who love God. Would God appreciate being called by this name?

Those who use this name most admit that it is a mistaken name. They, feel, however, that it is better than not using any name, because using a name for God helps to distinguish the true God from all the false gods of human invention. Thus in the book The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, the editors quote, and do not deny, the following statement:

"The word 'Jehovah' does not accurately represent any form of the

Name ever used in Hebrew" (The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, p. 20).

The editors insist, however, that it would be better to use this name than no name. But in that case why not use the name Yahweh? Modern biblical commentaries use this name because it is the best rendering of the four consonants YHWH. The Illustrated Bible Dictionary states: "Strictly speaking, Yahweh is the only 'name' of God" (quoted in the Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, p. 25).

Discussing why they refrain from using the name Yahweh and stick instead to using the name Jehovah, the Watchtower editors state:

"Why? Because it has a familiarity that Yahweh does not have. Would it not, though, be better to use the form that might be closer to the original pronunciation? Not really . . ." (The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, p. 9).

The editors then go on to argue that the accepted practice with using biblical names is to use a modern anglicised version of the name instead of trying to pronounce it the way it was originally pronounced in the Hebrew language. This is a strange line of argument, since the editors also argue strongly that the name of God is not like anyone else's name. And they are right, for the Bible says that the name must be sanctified (Matthew 6:9); the name must be used in addressing God (Exodus 3:15); and those who wish to be saved must call upon that name (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13). Knowing all of this, the editors conclude:

"Hence, the sanctification of God's name is far more important than any other issue" (The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, p. 29). Now, the Bible surely does not provide any sanction for anyone to use a mispronunciation of God's name and be satisfied in doing so. Surely those who wish to please God should exert utmost effort to know His real name. After all, the Bible says that God's name is holy (Leviticus 22:32). Would it be right to corrupt something so holy? That question is already answered by the Bible which says:

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Deuteronomy 5:11).

So how can anyone remain happy with mispronouncing God's name? How would God respond to you if you insist on using a name which you realize is a mispronunciation? Would Tom be happy if you call him Tim? Would Jane be happy if you call her June? Would Harry be happy if you call him Hurry? In each case the use of incorrect vowels result in a pronunciation that is either someone else's name or a ridiculous name.

Jehovah's witnesses say they use the name because it is already known

to others, rather than try to introduce a new name. But if they sincerely wish to use the more accurate name for God they could just as easily call themselves Yahweh's Witnesses and the name will quickly be heard door to door throughout the world.

Furthermore, the name Yahweh now has a widespread acceptance, since this is the name found in modern Bible commentaries.

Muslims who make up close to one quarter of the world population use a different name for God – the name Allah. In addition, Christians and Jews who speak the Arabic language also use the name Allah. Arabic Bible translations also contain the name Allah. In fact all Bibles contain the name Allah in its Semitic form. This we shall have to see in the discussion to follow.

Is God's name Yahweh?

As we have already seen, Yahweh is the best possible rendering of the four consonants YHWH. So, shall we conclude that Yahweh is the name of God? No – for three reasons. The first reason is that although Yahweh is the best rendering of YHWH, no one can say for sure that this is the correct rendering. The second reason is that the word Yahweh is a verb, whereas we expect God's name to be a noun. The third reason is that the record of how this name came to be revealed by God betrays a confusion over the name of God, as if the name which God revealed is missing from the text and has to now be manufactured by humans.

As for the first reason, the Watchtower publishers admit:

“The truth is, nobody knows for sure how the name of God was originally pronounced” (The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, p. 7).

As for the second reason, the editors of the New Jerusalem Bible explain the meaning of the name Yahweh as follows:

“It is part of the Hebrew verb ‘to be’ in an archaic form. Some see it as a causative form of the verb: ‘he causes to be’, ‘he brings into existence’. But it is much more probably a form of the present indicative meaning ‘he is’” (The New Jerusalem Bible, p. 85: notes on Exodus 3:14).

If Yahweh means ‘he is’, how can that be the name of God? When, for example, a Muslim says, “I believe in Allah as He is, “clearly in that statement God's name is not ‘he is’. God's name in that statement is ‘Allah’. Notice that if you say that God's name is Yahweh, you are in effect saying that God's name is he is. That does not make any sense, does it?

And that leads us to the third reason why we should not conclude that Yahweh is the name of God. This name is derived from the statement God made to Moses in Exodus 3:14. There, when Moses asked God for his name, God replied in the Hebrew language, “ehyeh eshei ehyeh.” The editors of the New Jerusalem Bible explain this as follows:

“The Hebrew can be translated literally: ‘I am what I am’, which would mean that God does not wish to reveal his name” (The New Jerusalem Bible, p. 85).

The editors then struggle with the fact that the obvious intention behind Exodus 3:14 is to reveal God’s name. Their task was to find a name, or anything that can be rendered into a possible name for God. The best they could do, given the text before them, is to convert the phrase ‘I am’ to ‘he is’, which in the Hebrew language is Yahweh. Thus, the name Yahweh is derived through human effort, not expressly revealed by God. But humans can know God’s real name only if God reveals it. The Watchtower editors admit this in their booklet The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, on page 6:

“In fact, we could never know God’s name unless the Creator himself told us.”

We agree. And we further proclaim that the Creator has indeed told us His name in His final book, the Glorious Qur'an, in which He declares that His name is Allah (see e.g. surah 112:1-2). This name in its Semitic form is in the Bible too, as we will soon prove. But first, we must see in the next part how the Bible is divided against itself over God’s real name.

The Bible Contradicts Itself

We have already seen that the name Jehovah is a hybrid resulting from combining the consonants YHWH with the vowels of another word Adonai. The result is a meaningless non-Hebrew word. We have also seen that Yahweh is probably the best rendering of YHWH. Now we must probe further into the origin of these four letters.

The Bible, however, presents a confusion over how this came to be known. In Exodus 3:14, we have already seen that when Moses asked God for His name God either refused to give his name or declared that His name is ehyeh meaning ‘I am’. From that, people started calling God Yahweh, meaning ‘He is’. Much later, in the sixteenth century C.E., someone arrived at the mistaken name Jehovah instead of Yahweh. This mistake found its way into the King James Bible. Therefore we find that where the King James Bible uses the name Jehovah for God, the New Jerusalem Bible uses the name Yahweh going back to the Hebrew language. With this brief outline, let us now return to the encounter

Moses had with God as described in the Bible.

The episode described in Exodus 3:14 is also described in two other passages in the Bible with remarkable differences. In one of these descriptions, when Moses asked God for his name, God said to Moses as follows:

“I am the LORD: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them” (Exodus 6:2-3 KJV).

The writer of this passage in the Bible must have made a mistake here. The book of Genesis in the Bible shows that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God by many names, including the name Jehovah (or more correctly Yahweh). The Hebrew text of the Bible shows that men started calling upon the name of Jehovah after the birth of Enosh, the grandson of Adam (see Genesis 4:26). This text contradicts Exodus 6:3 which says that the name Jehovah was not previously known. Genesis 4:26 also contradicts another verse in the same chapter! Whereas this verse says that the name Jehovah started being used after the birth of Adam's grandson, the beginning of the same chapter shows that the name was used long before that. When Eve gave birth to her first child, she said:

“I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah” (Genesis 4:12 American Standard Version).

So did God say to Moses what is reported in Exodus 6:3? No! God does not lie. He could not have said that he was not known by the name Jehovah prior to that. Otherwise, the book of Genesis would be wrong in several places where it reports that people knew God by the name Jehovah.

We have already seen some examples of the use of the name Jehovah prior to Moses. Let us look at some more. Genesis shows that God had already declared His name as Jehovah to Abraham (8:7). And Abraham repeated the name in the next verse (8:8). So how could God later say, as reported in Exodus 6:3, that Abraham did not know this name? Isaac also used this name (see 26:22, 25; 27: 7, 27). God Himself declared this name to Jacob (28:13). And Jacob has been using this name before and after that (see 27:20; 28:16, 21). So how could God say to Moses, as reported in Exodus 6:3, that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not know him by the name Jehovah?

Either Genesis is wrong here or Exodus is wrong. But could they both be wrong? For an answer, we shall have to turn to the Qur'an to find out what God really said to Moses, and what name He declared as His Divine Name that will endure forever.

The Name God Revealed to Moses

As we have already seen, the Bible contradicts itself over the question of God's name and when it came to be revealed. Exodus 6:3 shows that it was revealed to Moses for the first time, being previously unknown to humans. Genesis 4:26 contradicts this by showing that it was known long before that, since the birth of Adam's grandson. Genesis 4:2 contradicts the other two passages by showing that the name was known still earlier, and was used when Adam's first son was born. Which is right?

God has given us the solution to this puzzle by revealing in His final Book what He really had said to Moses, on whom be peace. In the Qur'an, we read that God said to Moses as follows:

“Lo! I, even I, am Allah. There is no God except Me. So serve Me and establish worship for my remembrance” (Qur'an 20:14; see also 28:30).

Notice that in the Qur'an God announced His name as Allah. This narrative makes much more sense than what we find in Exodus in the Bible. There we are told that God said to Moses, “I am what I am” (Exodus 3:14). Compare that with the way you would normally introduce yourself. You would not say, ‘I am what I am’, for that would mean that you do not wish to state your name. Instead, you may say, “I am Jack,” or “I am Jennifer.” Now, it is obvious that when you say that, no reasonable person will think that your name is ‘I am’. It is clear that your name comes after the phrase ‘I am’. Is it not strange that so many people insist that God's name is ‘I am’? It makes more sense that God's name should come right after the phrase ‘I am’ the way it occurs in the Qur'an where God says, “I am Allah” (20:14 and 28:30).

But is the name Allah a new name revealed to Moses for the first time? No. The Qur'an shows that many people prior to Moses knew God's name. As we have already seen, in the Bible too, in the book of Genesis we find that many others knew God's name before the time of Moses. If the Qur'an were to say that God's name was previously unknown, the Qur'an would then repeat the same mistake we have seen in Exodus 6:3. One striking feature of the Qur'an is that it does not contain a single error, since the author is God alone.

The name Allah is in several places in the Bible in its Semitic form, and clearly written Allah in the Arabic translations. The New Encyclopedia Britannica explains the origin of the name Allah as follows:

“The name's origin can be traced back to the earliest Semitic writings in which the word for god was Il or El, the latter being an Old Testament synonym for Yahweh. Allah is the standard Arabic word for “God” and is used by Arab Christians as well as by Muslims” (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990 edition, vol. I, p. 276).

El is a name frequently used for God in the Bible. According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus, on whom be peace, pronounced this name in one of the last statements he uttered (see Mark 15:34; cf. Matthew 27:46).

The Bible begins in Genesis 1:1 by mentioning this name in its full Hebrew form eloah plus the suffix im. The Oxford English Dictionary explains that the Arabic name Allah is related to the Hebrew name Eloah which we know is used again and again in the Bible (see The Oxford English Dictionary, 1933 edition).

Huston Smith, a scholar of comparative religion, remarks that the Hebrew name Eloah and the Arabic name Allah “sound much alike” (The World’s Religions, 1991, p. 222).

Next, we will examine how certain scribes tampered with the Bible and often removed God’s name from the text.

Taking out and putting God’s name into the Bible

Watchtower editors are generally concerned with upholding the reliability of the Bible text. However, their obsession with the name Jehovah has led them to claim that this name was present in the New Testament and later removed. Having become convinced that God’s name is Jehovah (or, more correctly YHWH) and that this name must be used by the faithful, Watchtower editors noticed that this name is absent from the New Testament except for a single chapter in a single book using an incomplete form of the name four times. In the book of Revelation the word HalleluYah means ‘Praise be to Yah,’ i.e. ‘Praise be to Yahweh.’ (See Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6). Watchtower editors comment:

“But apart from that, no ancient Greek manuscripts that we possess today of the books from Matthew to Revelation contains God’s name in full” (The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever, published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, p. 23).

How will they explain the absence of God’s name? Here is what they say:

“There are thousands of copies of the Christian Greek scriptures in existence today, but most of them were made during or after the fourth century of our Common Era. This suggests a possibility: Did something happen to the text of the Christian Greek scriptures before the fourth century that resulted in the omission of God’s name? The facts prove that something did” (The Divine Name . . . , p. 24)

What did happen? Who removed God’s name from God’s book?

Watchtower editors claim the following:

“The apostate Christian church managed to remove it completely from Greek language manuscripts of both parts of the Bible as well as from other language versions” (The Divine Name . . . , p. 25). They repeated this claim on p. 27: “Apostate Christians of the second and third centuries removed it [the name] when they made copies of Greek Bible manuscripts and left it out when they made translations of the Bible” (The Divine Name . . . , p. 27).

If this is true, one has to wonder what other things may have been changed in the manuscripts. It is also puzzling how on the one hand Watchtower editors maintain the absolute accuracy of transmission of the Bible text, and how on the other hand they claim this serious type of corruption. How would God view the fact that people removed His name from His book? They answer this question with the following question:

“If you were an author, how would you feel about someone who went to great lengths to remove your name from the book you authored?”
(The Divine Name . . . , p. 27).

Watchtower editors decided to restore God’s name to the Bible. The Hebrew Bible contains the name YHWH 6,828 times. Each time, the Watchtower editors retain the name, except in Judges 19:18 where keeping the name would make that verse contradict verse 29 in the same chapter. In addition, they believe that the name was removed from 146 places in the Old Testament. Finding support in other manuscripts, they added the name into the text those 146 times. Another 72 times, it is not so clear whether the name belongs in the text, so the name is placed in the footnotes.

The Watchtower editors also added the name 236 times in the New Testament to bring it closer to the Old Testament. They also added the name to I Corinthians 7:17 of their own accord, without any textual support, to make the verse clear.

We have already seen in the previous parts that Jehovah and Yahweh are humanly invented names. The four letters on which these names are based also come from humans. It would not be appropriate to explore this fully here, but we have already seen that the four letters were said to be revealed for the first time to Moses whereas if that were true much of Genesis would be wrong.

To trace the history of this name YHWH deserves a separate study. However, an indication may be hinted at here. The Israelites had split up between Ephraim in the North and Judah in the South. The Southerners and Northerners each kept their own record of Israelite History and Religion. In the record of the Northerners, the name of God

is Eloah plus the im suffix. In the record of the Southerners, the name of God is YHWH. These records were combined to form the first five books of the Bible. This explains why the creation is related twice, the flood is described twice, etc. In the first record of the creation, beginning at Genesis 1:1, you will notice that the name of God is Eloah plus the im suffix. Another creation account begins at Genesis 2:4, and this time God is called YHWH. This name is of obscure origin, and must be regarded as the contribution of the Southerners. It is therefore not a God-revealed name. It is no wonder, then, that none of the Gospels contain it. The Gospels contain instead the name Eloah which is used some 2500 times in the Bible.

The related Arabic name Allah is used more than 2500 times in the Qur'an. We can say for sure that this is the name that God revealed, because the Qur'an did not change during transmission over the centuries. Now that you know God's name for sure, you should start using it. As the New Encyclopedia Britannica explains, this name is used by Arabic speaking Christians as well as Muslims.

Muslims of every language use this name, for it distinguishes between the true God, Allah, and the false gods of human invention. The English word God is subject to derivations, but not so the Arabic word Allah. The English word 'God' can be modified to form 'Gods', 'Goddess', 'Goddesses', 'Godling*', and so forth. In the Arabic language, however, the name Allah is not subject to derivations. No wonder Muslims have a special attachment to this name. Another word in the Arabic language, Ilah, simply means God. This may refer either to the true God or to any false god. The name Allah, however, refers only to the one true God.

by Shabir Ally

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